Near-Death Experiences (NDEs)

Kergonan – June 21, 2017

NDEs (Near-Death Experiences) are believed to be quite common.

A 1993 Gallup poll estimated that they occur in 8% to 35% of cardiac arrest cases—representing 13 million people in the USA and 20 million in Europe.

A 1997 *U.S. News & World Report* article cited a figure of 60 million individuals who had undergone this transcendent experience following cardiac arrest; this represents 4% of the Western population, or 12 million Americans and 2.5 million French people.

They are far less common in regions of the world where resuscitation capabilities are virtually non-existent.

Prospective studies conducted in France and around the world show that gender, age, socio-cultural background, and religion have no effect on perceptions during an NDE.

They occur worldwide; the accounts are therefore independent of religion and culture.

However, there is a notably higher prevalence in the United States compared to the rest of the world—including Europe, despite the latter having an equivalent standard of care regarding resuscitation techniques.[1]

1) NDEs throughout history

The earliest recorded NDE dates back to Plato.

- Er the Pamphylian: 315 BC

  Book X of Plato's *Republic*

  This is the account of the journey taken by Er, who died on the battlefield.

  Each soul appears before a judge and goes either to Heaven or Beneath the Earth, depending on whether or not it was virtuous.

  However, souls that had been beneath the earth were punished sufficiently to subsequently rejoin the same rank as all the others, without distinction. Then each soul chooses a life pattern: reincarnation, and the choice of a guardian.

- Saint Paul: 2 Corinthians 12:2–4 (c. 54–57 AD)

[1] *Could the naivety of Americans be skewing these statistics?*
One might wonder, given that 80 million Americans believe in extraterrestrials and 8 million claim to have seen them (Express, June 28, 2012: Survey of 1,114 American adults conducted between May 21 and May 29, 2012, with a margin of error of +/- 2.9%).

I know a man in Christ who, fourteen years ago, was caught up to the third heaven (whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know; God knows).

And I know that this man (whether in the body or apart from the body, I do not know; God knows) was caught up into Paradise and heard ineffable words that a man is not permitted to utter.

- Vision of Cleonymus (Proclus, Greek philosopher, 5th century AD)

"It seemed to him that his soul, at the moment of death, had freed itself—as if from certain bonds—from the body lying beside it, had risen to the heights, and thus, hovering above the ground, had seen places on earth infinitely varied in appearance and color, as well as river currents invisible to humans.

It had reached Hestia (Vesta to the Romans: guardian deity of the hearth), frequented by demonic powers in the form of women of indescribable beauty..."

- Gregory of Tours (Frankish historian, 6th century AD)

Testimony of Salvius:

I was seized by two angels and carried into the heights of the heavens, such that I imagined I had beneath my feet not only this hideous earthly world, but also the sky, the moon, the clouds, and the stars.

Then, through a gate brighter than that light, I was led into a dwelling where the pavement shone like gold and silver; the light was ineffable, and the vastness indescribable. A multitude of people of both sexes covered it, such that it was absolutely impossible to gauge the depth or the breadth of the crowd... And I heard a voice saying, "Let this man return to the world, for he is needed by our churches." One heard only the voice, for it was absolutely impossible to discern the speaker...

2) Contemporary history of NDEs

- The term "Near-Death Experience" (NDE)—or *Expérience de Mort Imminente* (EMI) in French—was coined in the late 19th century, following a Swiss publication about mountaineers who had undergone such experiences after losing consciousness.[2]

It was not until later that Americans translated it as NDE. This German account of an NDE was not translated into English until the 1960s.

- The 1960s marked the beginning of effective resuscitation techniques; many people suffering cardiac arrest were brought back to life, and a number of them recounted having an NDE.

[2] *"Notizen über den Tod durch Absturz" ("Notes on Death Caused by a Fall") by the Swiss geologist Albert Heim in the Annals of the Swiss Alpine Club. 1871*

- A name and a book to remember: Raymond Moody, a US psychiatrist, wrote *Life After Life* in 1975, in which he reported numerous accounts of NDEs.

- Greyson, in the USA, has done extensive work on the subject of NDEs. Notably, he established the seven criteria used to identify an NDE.

In 2009, he wrote *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences: Thirty Years of Investigation*.

Other criteria have also been defined, notably the WCEI index, which is presented at the end of this article.

- In France, two authors are particularly worth noting:

- Dr. Jean-Jacques Charbonnier, an anesthesiologist-intensivist in Toulouse, who has written extensively on the subject, particularly following certain professional experiences.[3]

- Dr. Theillier, who published *Near-Death Experiences* in 2015, with a foreword by Bishop Aillet (Bishop of Bayonne)

Dr. Theillier served as the head of the Lourdes Medical Bureau for twelve years. He also wrote another fascinating book about the miracles of Lourdes *(*Lourdes: Miracles for Our Healing* / *Lourdes, des miracles pour notre guérison* – 2008).*

3) NDE accounts

Many videos featuring these accounts can be found on YouTube (Marie de Solemne, Nathalie Saracco, etc.).

There is also a very interesting website that has collected over 4,000 NDE accounts, a number of which are in French: www.nderf.org/French/index.htm

I will cite a few of them:

- Heather B.'s NDE

This is the NDE of a woman who, in March 2016, went into cardiac arrest due to an anesthesia-related complication during a medical procedure. The cardiac arrest lasted only 2 minutes and 45 seconds.

[3] *JJ Charbonnier: Bibliography – 15 books on NDEs*
- *L'après-vie existe (Life After Death Exists), CLC Plein Soleil, La Motte d'Aigues, 2006*
- *Les preuves scientifiques d'une vie après-vie (Scientific Proof of Life After Death), Exergues, 2008*
- *Les 7 bonnes raisons de croire à l'au-delà (7 Good Reasons to Believe in the Afterlife), Guy Trédaniel, 2012*

"I was in the hospital, receiving an anesthetic via an IV drip. When the tube became unblocked, the substance rushed into my body. I felt my heart go into extreme tachycardia. I screamed, 'My heart! My heart!' The nurses rushed toward me.

[OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCE:]

Suddenly, I found myself floating two and a half meters above my body. I was observing the scene below: a nurse was frantically rummaging through a cupboard, grabbing objects and tossing them onto the floor. A nursing assistant came running into the operating room. She had brought the doctor along with her; he rushed over to me and began chest compressions, while the nurses brought out a large needle." They were arguing over whether it was better to plunge it into my chest or into the IV line. I thought it was a dream, until the monitor beeped and displayed flat lines.

I said to myself, "Oh God, I'm dying!" I could see the doctors below frantically trying to resuscitate me. I cried out, "I don't want to die! Oh my God! No!"

[The TUNNEL and the LIGHT:]

I tried to dive back into my body, but instead, I fell backward into a dark tunnel at a speed that felt like thousands of kilometers per hour. It was terrifying, until I began to slow down. I realized the tunnel wasn't dark; it was filled with so many lights. There were colors I had never seen before. I was no longer afraid.

[HEAVEN:]

At the end of the tunnel lay the most magnificent place imaginable. It felt as though I were back in the room, yet in another dimension. I looked at everything and everyone in that hospital through what I can only describe as "the eyes of God." I felt God's love for all those people in the hospital—the patients, the staff, the receptionist. I didn't see my own life flash before me, but rather the lives of all those other people. I saw the receptionist and everything about her. I saw her heart; I felt her love for her babies. I felt her suffering and her thoughts. I saw the technician and everything about his life at that time. I saw each person as they truly were. I saw what motivated them, their magnificent, soulful hearts. I saw their souls as if through the eyes of God. I saw them and I loved them—every single one of those people. I felt as though I were rising up out of the room and leaving the building. I saw the people in the street and understood their suffering. I saw them with pure love.

[GOD's LOVE]

Then, I began to receive a download of information. There were no words, only information entering me, accompanied by absolute love. It was powerfully clear and certain that we are ALL VERY IMPORTANT TO GOD. We are all loved very, very deeply by God; life is meant to be difficult, but for God, it serves as a kind of proving ground for creation. The message was that our lives are of great importance to God and to the existence of the universe. The love we possess and cultivate on earth—especially toward people we find hard to like—somehow expands the universe and accomplishes vital things. I sensed that something significant was at stake, that we have a crucial task to perform. Human beings are deeply loved, and we are granted the choice of how to act in order to demonstrate God's existence. I don't know quite how to describe it—I am truly trying to explain it here, but it is difficult. It might take me a lifetime to explain what I learned.

In the place where we are going, we will find lightness, laughter, and joy, and our soul family awaits us there. Our task on earth is to figure out how to tear down all the illusory walls—the ones we erect everywhere to hide who we truly are. We really must love one another, as well as ourselves. I sensed a presence of humor, too—a deep appreciation for our lives and even for our failures. We are meant to learn from our failures, not torment ourselves over them. We find a way to forgive and love ourselves because, in reality—in the authentic realm of creation—only Love exists. The message seemed to be that if we do not find the path to love, we destroy something very, very precious.

I sensed a vast crowd of people around me, yet they did not appear human; they were pink forms, resonating with the energy that constituted them. I felt that my great-uncle Steve was there. I also sensed the presence of my grandmother, who is still alive. That was when I realized that when we pray, we are actually sending our spiritual self to that person. It is an act of creative love. The love was unimaginable; the beauty was so absolutely, so overwhelmingly incredible. Looking down at all those people—the doctors trying to save me—I thought, "All right! Let's go back! I love these people—oh, they are so deeply loved!" I wanted so much to return and tell them how loved they were. I was with my soul family, in the presence of what I would describe as the total love of the One who created everything. Yet, I wanted to go back.

The next moment, I found myself back in my body, squeezing the hand of the doctor who was holding mine. He was shouting, trying to bring me back. I said to him, "Oh Doctor, don't let me go!"

4) Some comments on NDEs

I will outline the various points I have gathered from these NDEs, drawing specifically on the views of people from different backgrounds: Heather (Jewish), Ricardo (Mexican Catholic priest), Arshan and Mohamed (Iranians, likely Muslim), Ali (Algerian, likely Muslim), Mwila (Congolese Catholic), and Nasir (Canadian Muslim) [4].

- TOTAL LOVE / Paradise

Heather: *"…the most magnificent place imaginable."*

"The level of love is so unimaginable, immense, and awe-inspiring… absolute joy, happiness, lightness, perfection…"

Ricardo: "*I experienced peace, joy, and absolute tenderness… loved unconditionally, forgiven for all my mistakes in life… all the love received from the light is love given to every human being, whether or not one believes in a Higher Being."*

"A feeling of unconditional love, total forgiveness, absolute peace, and irrepressible joy."

Arshan: *"The closer I got [to the light], the more joy and serenity I felt."*

Mohammed: *"I had never felt so good in my entire life."*

[4] Nasir, a Muslim hospitalized with a severe case of shingles, saw Jesus during his near-death experience and was miraculously healed. He became an evangelist and created a website worth visiting: www.wisdomministries.org

"I had the sensation that everything was connected to everything else, that there is neither beginning nor end."

Ali: *"I am [overwhelmed] with great happiness."*

Mwila: *"I understood that we must live in harmony with everyone, that everything is vanity, and that there is an eternal Higher Being."*

NB: On YouTube, Clémence de Solemne says she finally felt at home.

- The tunnel and the light

Heather traveled through a tunnel featuring multiple lights. *"I am an artist: the light I describe was not white, but rather resembled billions of shades of color I had never seen before..."*

Ricardo saw an immense white light: *"To me, this light is God Himself."*

(He did not see a tunnel, but crossed a desert.)

Arshan: No tunnel, *but "I was drawn toward this light by a great force."*

Mohamed: *"At one point, I passed through a tunnel at high speed and went to a very pleasant place made of light. I felt that this was my true home."*

Ali: *"I pass through a tunnel of light."*

Mwila*: "There was an extraordinary light."*

Lori: *"I felt a presence surrounding me like a tunnel; the swirl of colors and lights was stunning."*

- Religion

Heather: *"All religions try to explain God, but it is simply impossible."*

Ricardo (priest): *"Religious rites and theological studies now appear to me as mere signposts guiding us toward the Truth."*

Ali (Muslim?): *"I think these religions are cruel assumptions made by people trying to guess the Day of Resurrection—alarming, frightening, with severe punishments and torture. They scare us, I think, whereas it is actually all about mercy, love, euphoria, goodness, and benevolence."*

Ali: *"Less focus on religious practices."*

"The number of paths leading to God equals the number of breaths taken by all creation."

"We should not focus on current religions, but rather on the philosophy of life."

Nasir (Canadian Muslim): *"I saw a man at the foot of my bed... I couldn't see his face; it was too bright." No one had to tell me; I knew it was Jesus."*

- Faith

Heather is a moderate Jew whose religious practice remains moderate, but "*My once-hesitant belief in God has become rock-solid."*

Ricardo: *"I live every moment with greater gratitude toward God and life... I experience Mass more intensely."*

Arshan: "My spirit and soul are more important to me than my body."

- Reviewing the past

Heather: *"My past flashed before me, beyond my control."*

Arshan: *"My life and all its events began to play out in my mind."*

Mohamed: *"He [his guide] showed me scenes from my own life; they unfolded in chronological order, starting from the very beginning of my life on earth."*

Ali: *"I remembered my sins."*

- Life on earth

Heather: *"The other world is the true reality; our world [on earth] is different—it is a sort of testing ground."*

Ricardo: *"My only goal in life [on earth] is to love every human being with the love I received from the light. That is the only true life."*

Mohamed: *"My presence on earth felt like the exile of a stranger... in the place where I was then... everything seemed absolutely perfect."*

Ali: *"This agony on earth is enough for us"* (regarding his view on religions and their cruel assumptions about severe punishments after death).

- Time

Heather's cardiac arrest lasted 2 minutes and 45 seconds.

Ricardo's lasted 10 seconds.

Arshan: unconscious for 15 to 20 minutes.

Mohamed: 32 minutes.

- Fear of death

Ricardo: *"The fear of death has vanished, because I know what awaits me."*

Arshan: *"I am no longer afraid of death."*

- Appearance

Heather: *"The people did not possess a human body; they resembled pink, vaporous forms, smiling with joy and vibrating with love."*

Ricardo: *"I couldn't see my hands or what I was wearing, because I couldn't see my body either."*

Arshan: *"I felt as though I had turned into energy."*

Mohamed: *"I possessed a transparent, luminous body" (his hand passed right through the bodies of the people he touched).*

- Guardian Angel:

Mohamed (Iranian): *"I had a vague sense that a presence was constantly following me... an astonishing divine figure, human in appearance, radiating intense love and light... I felt that this figure loved me deeply and unconditionally... that he had always been with me throughout my life—always. He was my guide."*

- Hell

Ricardo: *"Catholic teaching holds that those who die in a state of mortal sin go to hell; yet, in the experience I underwent, I became certain that upon death, every human being—even one burdened with mortal sins—is welcomed by the loving light."*

Mohamed (a Muslim?): *"...a powerful earthly attachment can prevent the soul from ascending."*

"I saw people who had committed suicide among the earthbound souls; they seemed to be enduring the worst plight. They were completely trapped, with no means of communicating with anyone. Sometimes, these souls would follow their loved ones on earth like a shadow for years, begging for forgiveness for the pain they had caused by taking their own lives. But it was in vain; they went unheard."

Lori: during her NDE, she encountered her ex-boyfriend, who had died by suicide; *"I can therefore state that people who commit suicide are undoubtedly in the other world."*

Er the Pamphylian—an NDE case from the 4th century BC—had already noted that souls condemned to vanish beneath the earth were subsequently rehabilitated after that terrible punishment.

NB: Interestingly, while out of his body, Mohamed sees a young man in a hospital bed and assumes he has a twin brother he didn't know about, who happens to be in the same hospital.

In conclusion,

I must admit that negative NDEs also exist; one should read, in particular, about Gloria Polo's NDE (Dr. Theillier discusses it in his book, and her various accounts can be found on YouTube).

I do not discuss them at all—having studied them very little—because I much prefer the optimistic NDEs!

Our Christian faith promises us eternal life.

This discovery of "Near-Death Experiences" offers a glimpse of another, wonderful life after death: **Absolute Love.**

The "rational" aspect serves to beautifully illustrate the Christian faith.

I can easily imagine that this refers to the absolute and unconditional love of God.

The WCEI (Weighted Core Experience Index) comprises 10 items rated based on their presence or absence; scores of 1 to 5 indicate a superficial experience, 6 or higher indicate a core experience, and a score of 10 indicates a profound NDE. The questions in this questionnaire are as follows:

1. the subjective feeling of being dead;
2. a feeling of peace;
3. separation from the body;
4. entering a dark region;
5. encountering a presence or hearing a voice;
6. reviewing one's own life;
7. seeing or being enveloped in light;
8. seeing magnificent colors;
9. entering the light;
10. encountering spirits.